

Politics and Economics

U.S. Senate candidate speaks to Voices

by Suzan Erem

Cong. Joe Sestak, 7th District, is running against Sen. Arlen Specter in the Democratic primary this Spring. Sestak is a 31-year Navy veteran, three-star admiral and is serving his second term in the U.S. House of Representatives. Voices had an exclusive interview with Cong. Sestak when he visited Centre County in mid-January. Here are excerpts from that interview, which can be viewed in its entirety at www.voicesweb.org.

Voices: Tell us about the district you represent and how your Navy experience helps you lead.

Joe Sestak: My district was 55 percent Republican when I went to run the first time, 33 percent Democrat. It's a wonderful district because it represents all of America...It's a great district because by and large they're independent minded.

In the military you were truly understood that you were responsible for the young men and women that one would lead into harm's

way, but you were also accountable for them and that's how I try to run my office. We never close. We handled three times the constituent caseload of the average congressional office.

I'm willing to put my position out there, listening first as a representative, then stating this is how, having listened, I intend to vote, and willing to be accountable irregardless of losing the job. It's about principled leadership.

V: We hear about Blue Dogs, Wellstone Democrats and such. In just one or two words, if you had to label yourself, what kind of Democrat are you? Where do you land in the spectrum?

JS: I've always considered myself extremely pragmatic, but that's managed to land me smack dab in the progressive wing of the Democrats. Why do I consider that pragmatic? Everybody in the military has healthcare, when we go to war, healthy warriors, and we don't worry about our families, like when I left for 11 months, about being

covered. Education? We no longer advance you to senior chief petty officer until you have an Associates college degree in technology; your time our money. Economic security? C'mon in. Stay around 20 years we'll give you a pension, not only that we'll teach you a skill. So you have quality of life in your next life. So that's how I landed smack dab in the progressive wing because we invest in people but also with a sense of accountability in that investment.

V: President Obama is supporting Sen. Specter, and asking the rest of the Democratic Party leadership to support him. Specter already has the support of Ruth Ruddy, Democratic National Committee member from Centre County. In view of that, how



Cong. Joe Sestak

would you characterize the Centre County Democratic Committee's role regarding your visit here this week?

JS: There'll be a number of the committee members coming to the meeting tonight. Dianne [Gregg] and others have helped organize it. I respect the president and I don't begrudge him in the very tough battle he's had down there and the political calculation of wanting the 60th vote. But at the end of the day it's about us Pennsylvanians. We didn't seize the White House through political calculation; we seized it through audacity. We ran against the establishment. And you can't vote just once for change you've got to fight for change.

...I would run against Arlen Specter if he was Republican or Democrat. In his heart of hearts, I think President Obama wants a real Democrat.

Voices: Into your second term in the

see Sestak, pg. 4

State cuts funding for small business development

by Oliver Connery

While politicians frequently cite small businesses as the driver of innovation, economic growth, and job creation, funding for the 18 Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) in Pennsylvania was cut by 45 percent in the 2009-2010 PA state budget.

SBDCs offer free business consulting services and educational programs for new, inexperienced entrepreneurs and established small businesses. The Penn State SBDC serves Centre and Mifflin counties from its Innovation Park and Lewistown locations.

The Penn State SBDC has helped local entrepreneurs like Morley and Scott Wong of the Green Bowl, David Hellyer of Comfort Keepers, and Piezo Resonance with advice on accounting, business plan writing, and negotiating loans with banks. They even helped RainbowMusic with expanding their store and inventory.

The importance of new small businesses cannot be understated. Sixty to eighty percent of new jobs are created by small businesses that have 1-500 employees, according to the national SBDC website. These small businesses employ half of all employees, pay 44.7 percent of all payroll, and provide for 50 percent of the GDP.

In addition, they funnel the money they make back to other businesses by buying from others. They account for 74 percent of goods and services (including loans) purchased from the banking industry, 70.8 percent of the real estate market, and 65.3 percent of the advertising/promotion market, according to Entrepreneur Magazine.

Starting a small business is not easy. One-third of small businesses fail in their first two years, and after four to six years, sixty percent of small businesses will fail, according to figures from the Small Business Administration (SBA). The average lifespan is ten years, not only because of failure but because they finally break

even, single owners lose interest, retire, get bought out and cannot or will not pass the business on.

Furthermore, many small businesses operate on small margins, which leave them vulnerable to market fluctuations. The SBA recently found that states with high unemployment see a higher rate of business start-ups, particularly "non-employer firms," as people laid off from their jobs attempt to work for themselves, but don't hire any other employees.

SBDCs are funded at local, state, and federal levels. The federal government currently supports the development of small businesses by providing matching funding for SBDCs through the SBA. The SBA then partners with universities and state and local governments to set up offices of the SBDC. They also partner with state agencies, such as the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, other governmental institutions like the Defense Logistics Agency, and non-govern-

mental institutions like Ben Franklin Technology Partners or the Life Science Greenhouse Fund to work with local chambers of commerce, development corporations and other faith-based and neighborhood partners. Acting as a network, these organizations help create support for a continual flow of emergent small businesses.

Small businesses that receive assistance from the SBDC and similar organizations succeed at rates as high as 87% through the sixth year, almost double the expected rate, according to the National Business Incubator Program.

"The center helps both the new entrepreneur and the banks analyze the efforts of the owner in the new business and whether it is feasible to develop the business into a viable revenue generator," said Linda Feltman, Senior Businesses Analyst of SBDC.

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from Sestak, pg. 3

House, you are running against one of the most powerful senators in the country. He was known as a moderate Republican—pro-choice, good voting record on labor; supported the public option—in a time when moderate Republicans are hard to find. Now as a Democrat, he is expected to get his seniority back if he wins this next election. Isn't it better the devil you know?

JS: I think somebody needs to know the devil; he's actually the emperor with no clothes. His actual labor record lifetime is 61 percent. That is not pro labor. That is not pro working family.

And so there's been a perception, but 2,000 votes for President Bush, where Rick Santorum said he was the critical vote for the tax cuts, where he was the chair for President Nixon's statewide campaign as well as President Bush's, where he actually voted for the tax cuts that let large corporations keep their profits overseas and not come home to be taxed, to where he voted for the Halliburton loophole so that now when Halliburton drills for Marcellus shale they don't have to tell us the chemicals they put in the water. I call that lockstep with Rick Santorum.

I sit back here and say seniority? What did you do with your seniority? Pennsylvania in the last 30 years grew 30 percent more jobs; the rest of the country did 58 percent. We're forty-eighth in SAT scores. The youth aren't staying; our population growth in that time was 5.4 percent; the rest of the nation was 34 percent. And seniority? Do you think [Sen. Bob] Casey wants to be the junior senator again?

Voices: Will you get the endorsement of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO?

JS: I don't know. I find that I get the locals, but I do understand about the establishment. It's the working families, those where Arlen Specter actually voted four times against increasing Pell grants so youth could go to college, especially here in Pennsylvania where it's so expensive, three times against S-CHIP to cover 4 million more children and low income women who are pregnant.

No, I think once people see the record and recognize that Arlen's politics—switching on public option, switching on Defense of Marriage Act, switching on card check—once they see his politics helped get us into this mess, there's no way they're going to say help get us out.

Voices: On healthcare you say that single payer is not the right way to go, but you support the public option. If in your opinion the government is good enough to run an alternative to private sector health insurance, why isn't it capable of running it all?

JS: What I say about single payer is that it isn't a bad choice, I just believe that covering everyone is necessary but the efficiency of that in the long term is better if you have fair competition and transparency in that competition. That's what the public option really is. The issue is it's funded and lives or dies only by the amount of co-pays and premiums of those who join it. It wasn't funded by the government.

Do I think it's unfair today? Absolutely. What we did was take out the antitrust provisions of the insurance, put a competitor out there that is going to live or die on making fair competition. By the way, that doesn't mean you rule out single payer, I believe in

the longer term, competition gives rise to less cost and more entrepreneurship and innovation.

Voices: How much less cost can you get than the administrative costs of Medicare?

JS: Medicare is going bankrupt. We fund England and Canada, because they buy our drugs at one-third the cost of where we buy them...Medicare and Medicaid are good, necessary programs but you know Dartmouth University has said one third is inefficient in it. I don't know if that study is perfect, but when you have San Francisco paying \$8,000 for Medicare and Miami doing \$16,000 you've got to bring about a better system.

If we can't get these insurance companies out of this monopoly then we've got to try something else. I felt the Massachusetts health care program was a model to try to control costs in the long term. I doubt everybody will agree with me.

V: You've been very active on the issue of education. Do you have more to say on No Child Left Behind?

JS: ...The most important thing to do in it was to change how we assess schools. I agree with President Bush's concept of accountability, but they measure it wrongly. In fact, Pennsylvania qualified last year for the new way. We know all children don't come in equally...When they all have a problem that's where you put your money to fix that curriculum, and we try to get 25 percent of the grades to be flexible in the high schools.

I also have an amendment for security in schools. We know when a woman goes to campus, I think 1.5 out of every 5 is sexual-

ly assaulted and the majority of those are in the first year. So I've been the sponsor of campus safety resolutions every year...

V: You support improving and expanding the program that would actively place veterans in elementary school classrooms. Veterans Affairs has treated almost 115,000 soldiers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the estimates of those not seeking treatment are much higher.

...What would happen if a veteran struggling with PTSD ended up losing it in a classroom full of 3rd graders?

JS: Twenty-three million Americans suffer from the Number One disease in this nation—mental illness. This is a segment that's coming back with PTSD being added to that. I spent Veteran's Day in state prison visiting our vets there who came home and they did not have the VA ready for them, so they turned to dependency on alcohol or drugs. That's why 47 percent of our vets in Pennsylvania prisons are dependent...

I would say that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder began almost as a civilian illness. It happens to children in downtown Philadelphia or Pittsburgh. All of a sudden there's a violent act and they suffer. It's a little bit different, but not an uncommon challenge.

Voices: ...Why would you aim them for elementary schools?

JS: PTSD does not mean they are violent. There are many, many, many people who have PTSD from growing up in center cities and we don't preclude them from doing it.

see Sestak, pg. 8

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Students propose a more sustainable borough

by Hannah Abelbeck

This fall, students in Seth Baum's introductory geography course also got a lesson in civic engagement.

In Geog 30, Geographic Perspectives on Sustainability and Human-Environment Systems, students worked with the Borough of State College, particularly the Department of Public Works, to propose sustainability initiatives on energy, land use, transportation or waste. In groups, they developed their ideas through library research, discussions with borough council members and interviews with borough residents, and they presented their projects at open public meetings on Dec. 1 and 3 in the Borough Hall Community Room. Their audience included borough councillors, interested locals, and the mayor.

"Students should recognize that impor-

"If the borough altered its definition of garbage, food would be composted, not thrown away."

--Grace Schmidt

tant knowledge and information lie not just in the university but also among residents and professionals everywhere. Indeed, it is only through the application of the best of human knowledge—wherever it may be found—that humanity can effectively rise to the challenges of sustainability," wrote Baum in a CDT op ed.

As part of their experience, the students were asked to write individually about their work in a public forum. In this issue, we

have given space to four students who have written about their projects for us. These pieces—TeAnna Johnson on rainwater collection, Grace Schmidt on food composting, Breanna Beiswenger on a pedestrian

mall downtown and Perri Hammershlag on temperature regulation—show that even young undergraduates can reach an audience beyond the classroom and contribute meaningfully to public discourse.

Cisterns to collect rainwater

by TeAnna Johnson

As part of our class project to learn how to make places sustainable, we were given the chance to propose a change to the Borough of State College. Our "Land Use" group proposed the use of a cistern for the management of storm water on the Public Works Facility property in the borough. Storm water management has become a large concern for The Borough of State College. As of now, it has no plan to collect excess storm water run-off. We came up with the best solution for that.

Scientists who have researched the uses, regulations and costs of collected rainwater propose rain gardens, green roofs, cisterns and grassy swales for storm water management.

Rain water normally falls off the roofs and flows down the parking areas collecting dirt and chemicals on its way to a water source. By collecting the water before it hits the ground, a cistern can dramatically reduce the amount of contaminants in our water supply.

After the water is collected and stored, the water can then be used for many purposes, like to water lawns and gardens all year long and especially during drought

seasons when water isn't as plentiful.

We think a cistern would be the best way to collect the water because it is a single unit and could provide water for the landscaping and turf around the Public Works Facility. There are three buildings on the Public Works Facility property, so we recommended three cisterns, one to collect the storm water from each building. Since the third building is under construction, it might be easier and less costly for the cisterns to be installed if they one can be added soon.

Borough members wanted us to find the dimensions of the land as well as the dimensions for the new building so that our proposal would include a proper sized cistern for each building. We calculated the amount of annual rainfall, and believe our proposal takes the amount of water into consideration.

The water the cisterns collect will still be gray water and not suitable for drinking without treatment, but that is perfect for the use of watering lawns and plants. By showing how to manage excess storm water successfully, we hope that other buildings in State College would follow suit and try using cisterns as well.

Politics & Economics

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Borough supports turning food waste into compost

by Grace Schmidt

With over 100 restaurants in the State College Borough, a lot of food waste is not being composted, contributing to the growing nationwide landfill problem.

In a geography class I enrolled in at Penn State this fall, my group grappled with ways that the State College Borough could alter its current composting and recycling system.

Almost 60 percent of the materials US households discard are organic, and therefore can be easily recycled or composted, according to a recent Congressional Quarterly report, "The Future of Recycling: Is a Zero Waste Society Achievable?" Organic materials include food scraps, yard trimmings, paper and paperboard.

While State College ordinances, specifically VIII Part A: Municipal Waste, Section 101, discuss composting and food scraps, they list "animal, fruit, and vegetable waste" under garbage. If food is defined as garbage, then it is not composted. Their definition for compost makes no provision for food composting.

If the borough altered its definition of garbage, food would be composted, not thrown away. This could apply not just to household organic material but also to restaurants. Three local restaurant owners said that they currently follow the Borough's recycling program, but they do not compost because there is no system installed for it.

If the Borough told us to compost our leftover food scraps, then we would, said

one local restaurant manager.

After surveying a number of students, who are the main consumers of downtown restaurants and services, we discovered that convenience is a key factor in determining whether people recycle.

Our student group came to the conclusion that the Borough needs to create a new composting system that can be used by restaurants and households, and it must keep convenience in mind.

A dual composting and recycling system implemented in San Francisco has been met with much success and is a good model for improving the Borough's current system.

The new policy will have an emphasis on restaurants, since they have more food scraps and waste than most businesses or homeowners.

Like the San Francisco composting and recycling system that is designed "to be simple and user-friendly," it will apply to both household residencies and local businesses, like restaurants.

The system uses a color-coded system: organic wastes go into one collection cart, recyclables go into another, and trash goes into another.

One local restaurant manager said that the system sounds good, but the Borough would have to take into mind the quantity of food scraps restaurants go through on a daily and weekly basis. One local resident at the December 3 meeting commented that the Borough will also have to keep in mind health code regulations. This means that the organic waste bin may have to be emptied more frequently for restaurants.



Photo by Hannah Abelbeck
A hand-written sign on a Webster's Bookstore Cafe trash can urges customers to help compost both food and paper waste. Composting efforts have begun across the borough.

One reason for its success in San Francisco is that businesses, which also use a color-coded collection system, "receive a 25 percent discount on their trash pickup for separating food waste."

According to the same report, "Rather than viewing the food collection program as a burden, restaurants praise it. It's increased the morale in the kitchens. People feel they're not throwing things out, they're doing something good for the environment while they're working," a supervisor of eight restaurants in San Francisco said.

According to the CQ Researcher report,

approximately 250 tons of municipal waste is generated yearly at the national level, and only about a third is "recovered" for recycling and/or composting. The rest is dumped into landfills.

As landfills are becoming more of an environmental concern, it is important that State College, with such a high number of local establishments and residencies, begin making changes at the local level.

In January the borough, funded by the DEP, began food compost pick up in some neighborhoods to assess its feasibility. For info contact foodwaste@statecollegepa.us

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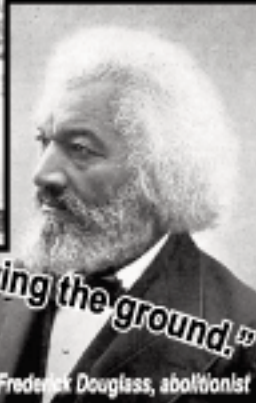
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Pedestrian mall gets mixed reactions

by Breanna Beiswenger

It is almost noon and a cool breeze blows autumn's colorful, crisp leaves from West College Avenue onto Allen Street. Following that breeze are three employees of a local bank on their way to The Corner Room for lunch. Close behind, there is an elderly woman with a bag of groceries, packed full to the brim. And behind her? Countless others.

Throughout the day the volume of foot traffic will be unlikely to change. Allen Street and its College Avenue crosswalk, is one of the busiest areas for pedestrians in downtown State College.

My group of six Penn State students was not the first to imagine a solution to the conflicts created between pedestrians, drivers, and bicyclists. Others have proposed turning Allen Street into a pedestrian mall, spanning from Beaver Avenue to College Avenue. A pedestrian mall would restrict automobile traffic to emergency vehicles and some delivery vehicles, and it would encourage foot traffic in a store-lined area in the center of downtown.

None of these previous proposals for a pedestrian mall have been turned into reality in State College. Through a geography class about geographic perspectives on sustainability, my group presented our proposal at a December 3 meeting at the Borough Council Hall, giving Borough Councilors and citizens another opportunity to revisit the idea.

The six students in my group stood for two weekends in a row on the four corners of Allen Street and surveyed numerous residents and non-residents of the borough asking their opinions on the matter. Out of 57 people surveyed the first day, only three said they would not support the proposal. An enthusiastic woman carrying a small child said, "A pedestrian mall on Allen Street? I love it! We need a place to get together downtown!" A resident in his fifties said, "I have lived in State College my whole life and I like things the way they are." The man went on to explain that he was not completely against the idea of a pedestrian mall; he did not feel that change is needed if nothing is wrong in the first place.

Some people we talked to about our proj-

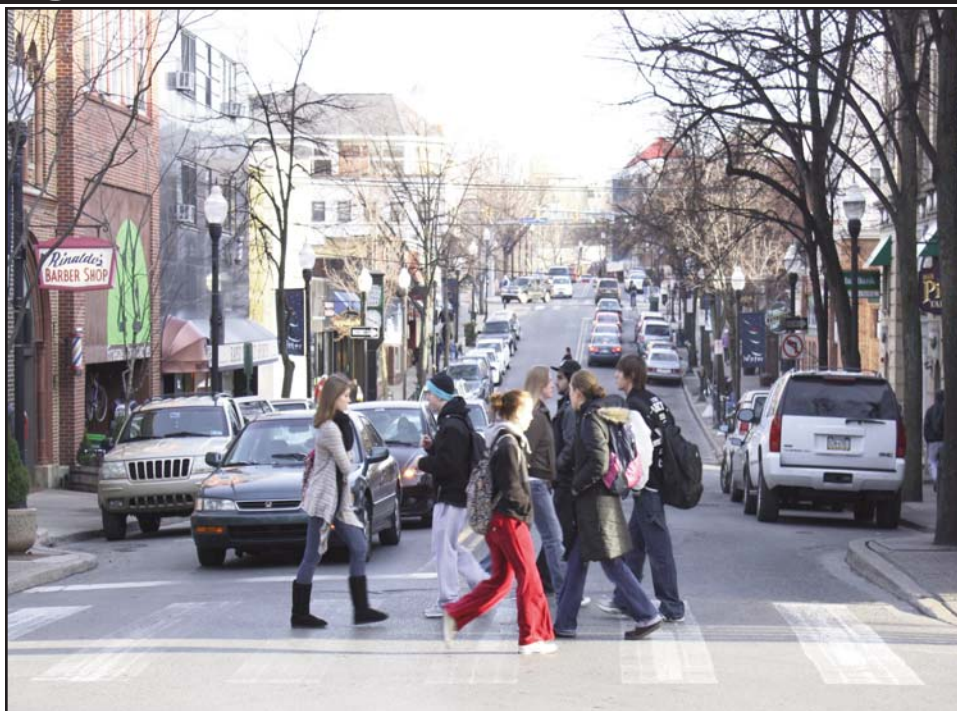


Photo by Douglas Adler

Traffic at the crosswalk on Allen Street. A proposal to turn this block into a pedestrian mall was the subject of one student group's class project.

ect thought that the mall couldn't just please pedestrians. They cautioned that with the economy the way it is, business owners on the street may not want a street that carries heavy traffic turned into a place only accessible by foot.

We asked the local business owners of Penn State what their opinions were. One owner of an Allen Street jewelry shop said a pedestrian mall could be a nice idea for pedestrians, but from experience in a different location, she fears her business would suffer.

Other business owners surveyed felt differently. The owner of an Allen Street bicycle shop could not stop talking about how wonderful he thought the idea was. A woman who co-owns a bookstore cafe with her husband said the walking mall would be a lovely addition to Allen Street and did not seem concerned their business would see any decrease in sales.

One of the most important aspects of our group's presentation became explaining how Calder Way would remain open so businesses would be able to still receive deliveries and use the road for loading and unloading.

My group really hoped to demonstrate

that a pedestrian mall could bring a lot of positive qualities to downtown. It would give individuals a place to get together and enjoy themselves. We would like to see possible features of the mall include a water feature such as a fountain, street vendors, park benches and one or more small gardens.

We also wanted to bring the weekly Downtown Farmers Market to the pedestrian mall, which would mean not having to close off Locust Lane every Friday and bring more foot traffic to Allen Street.

from Sestak, pg. 4

What sets apart the military is not that they're out there shooting, but that they bear the dignity of danger. And I have been taken by how well they bear that. Their Post Traumatic Stress Disorder comes about a different way, but it should no more proscribe them from having an occupation than anyone else. You would need to extend it to probably millions.

See Cong. Sestak on video and this interview in its entirety at www.voicesweb.org.

from Business, pg. 3

The Director of SBDC, Heather Fennessey noted that although they don't keep track of the local success and failure rates, Center County small businesses do follow national trends. Fennessey said that under the current economic conditions they have not seen a reduction in the numbers of small businesses served, but they have noticed a shift in the types of businesses served.

Feltman confirmed they are seeing a shift from mid-size (20-50 employees) businesses to smaller low-size businesses (0-5 employees).

When budgets are tight or there is an increase in political pressure to cut government spending, funding for services like the SBDC often suffer. But the SBA's budget was already cut over 40% between 2001 and 2009. Although the federal government has not yet cut their funding again, the SBDC relies on matching funding from all the partners involved to sustain its support.

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A difference of a few degrees can make a lot of cents

by Perri Hammerslag

Heating and cooling an average American home makes up the majority of the monthly energy bill, roughly 50-70 percent. And sometimes, that energy is being wasted.

For instance, a college student wakes up on a January morning to snow falling. He gets dressed in a heavy sweater and thick socks in order to stay warm. After trekking through the snow, he arrives at the classroom to find that the heat is on full blast because it is so cold outside. He starts sweating under the heavy sweater he put on this morning, and he wishes that he put on a t-shirt in the middle of winter.

For our presentation to the Borough of State College my group proposed that the borough should manage and restrict the temperature in borough buildings by not cooling the building below 75 degrees during the summer and not heating the building above 68 degrees during the winter. Each degree increase on the thermostat in the winter and each degree decrease in the summer can increase the cost of

heating and cooling by as much as 3 percent.

The idea of temperature restrictions is not new. In July of 1979, the Department of Energy proposed the Emergency Building Temperature Restrictions and Regulations on heating, cooling and domestic hot water in commercial, industrial, government, and other nonresidential buildings. The Department of Energy proposed restrictions similar to ours and they determined that with full compliance of the nation during 1979 that oil could be reduced by as much as 400,000 barrels daily. At the OPEC prices of the time, that figure represents a portion of savings to the nation of more than \$2 billion during a nine month period.

Although that was a nationwide plan, the Borough of State College could still save a meaningful amount of money on its own scale if temperature restrictions were placed in Borough buildings.

If it goes well, maybe others would follow. How much money would a business or homeowner save? How many resources would we save in State College?

Would this buy us enough time to create and implement a more sustainable way to heat and cool the buildings? Could we use the savings to pay for a solution?

Some of the newer Borough buildings already have temperature restrictions in place. These thermostats can keep the building at a certain temperature and not allow the temperature in the building to go above or below a certain degree. Also, these thermostats are set to be lowered at times when no one is occupying the building.

But what is really wasting money and energy are the older Borough buildings that do not have these temperature restrictions in place. Yes, it may be very expensive to install new thermostats that can digitally restrict the temperature of the building. But paying to heat or cool them is costing already.



Photo by Hannah Abelbeck
Students concluded that borough heating and cooling systems could be used more efficiently.



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